
Best Practice Fact Sheet –Addressing Major Barriers

BUILDING NEBRASKA’S FAMILIES (BNF)

Program

Description:	University Extension staff provides TANF clients with weekly home visits, life skills training and practice. Once accepted into the program, it on average, from 11 to 12 months and clients may participate for up to six months after leaving TANF. Alternatively, clients may receive bi-weekly home visits for up to 8 months.
Target Population:	TANF clients in rural areas with serious personal/family barriers and skill deficiencies
Goal:	Develop the basic skills necessary to engage in employment activities
Caseload Data:	Monthly active cases 120-150; average BNF educator caseload set at 12 to 18 participants who received services, on average, from 11 to 12 months. Staffing included a University administrator to oversee the program.
Cost:	\$7,400 per year per participant overall, and about \$8,300 per participant per year for the very hard-to-employ
Evidence:	Mathematica fully experimental randomized study under the ACF Rural Welfare-to-Work Strategies Demonstration Evaluation
Assessment:	Master’s level staff from the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension conduct a 20-item program entry and exit checklist

Description of Services:

- Building Nebraska’s Families (BNF) operated in more than 10 multi-county rural services areas from 2002 through 2005 and ended under overall budget pressures.
- BNF educators provided intensive pre-employment, life skills training from the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension master’s level staff based on clients’ needs.
- BNF educator provided consultation with TANF staff to refer and enroll clients into the program, provide updates on clients’ goals and accomplishments and information related to clients’ work-related service needs such as transportation and childcare.
- At the initial meeting, the BNF educator describe the program and ask the client to complete a 20-item program entry checklist (such as “I feel positive about my life” or “I keep a record of how I spend my money”). This checklist is completed again when the client exits BNF to measure progress.
- BNF educator provided one-on-one weekly home visits to clients accepted into the program
- BNF used research-based (Building Strong Families) curricula covering: self-esteem, healthy relationships, parenting, goal setting, problem solving, money management, communication skills, how to access resources, and interact with agencies and employers ([Survive, Strive, Thrive: Keys to Healthy Family Living](#))
- “Success markers” track progress - divided into tiers according to difficulty to achieve: (1) basic tasks such as keeping appointments and coming prepared to lessons; (2) higher-level activities such as setting short-

term goals and practicing new skills; and (3) accomplishments, such as maintaining employment and serving as a mentor for others.

- Allows participant to choose first topic area and goal
- Positive role modeling
- Referrals to other service providers made as needed
- Participants volunteer at community organizations
- Support continues up to 6 months after employment
- Weekly BNF educator meetings to coach and train staff

Eligibility:

Participant must be an active TANF case, or have received a first or second sanction, or be at the end of a third sanction period; be willing to enter BNF; have attempted or been considered for less intensive programs; and face multiple challenges, such as a poor family or individual work history and habits, limited education, or difficulties with parental roles and daily structure. TANF clients who are exempt from work rules (for reasons such as a serious injury or illness, incapacity due to a physical or mental impairment, or domestic violence) may volunteer for the program.

Findings:

- Impacts were strong and significant for the very hard-to-employ. BNF was effective in increasing employment and earnings, quality of life and reducing poverty for this group.
- For the very hard-to-employ, individuals worked significantly more months and hours than their control group counterparts. They were also significantly more likely to work in higher-paying jobs with better benefits, retain employment, and move to a better job.
- Some benefits couldn't be quantified—such as a reduction in the future incidences of physical domestic abuse and an increase in the likelihood that a minor child would remain in the home.
- BNF may be cost-effective over time if targeted to particularly disadvantaged and low-functioning clients. They estimated that positive net benefits would result if BNF were offered only to very hard-to-employ clients and if the average earnings impact for these clients during the last six months of the 30-month follow up were to persist for 1.7 years after the follow up.

Implications for policymakers and program developers to consider:

- Consider intensive and individualized approaches to clients' multiple needs.
- Target programs carefully. Because the study revealed strong impacts and encouraging benefit-cost findings for the very hard-to-employ, future efforts should target services to particularly disadvantaged and low-functioning clients.
- Provide postemployment work supports.
- If the program is replicated in an urban area, greater population density may compel life skills trainers to carry larger caseloads and deliver a limited number of lessons in group settings. These adaptations could reduce costs and potentially improve BNF's cost-effectiveness.

Resources:

Nebraska's Building Nebraska's Families program was recommended by Doctor Donna Pavetti of the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. Information was also provided by Marilyn Fox, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension 308-385-5088 mfox1@unl.edu.

["Teaching Self-Sufficiency through Home Visitation and Life Skills Education"](#) Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (July 2009)

“Rural Welfare to Work Strategies Demonstration Project Site Profile – The Building Nebraska Families Program”, Administration for Children and Families (2002)